COVERING CHAVEZ IN U. S. MEDIA: HOW ELITE NEWSPAPER REPORTS A CONTROVERSIAL INTERNATIONAL FIGURE*

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RESUMEN

Hasta qué punto las voces que entran en conflicto con las posiciones hegemónicas son escuchadas en las noticias de cubrimiento internacional y cómo estos patrones del discurso público cambian a medida que nuevos sucesos se develan. Este texto analiza los artículos publicados sobre el presidente venezolano Hugo Chávez en un periódico elitista de Estados Unidos durante el periodo 2001-2002. Se efectuó el análisis de contenido de 65 artículos que pertenecían a tres períodos (antes, durante y después del golpe de Estado). Se halló que las voces anti-chavistas predominaban en los discursos de la esfera pública, hasta que un golpe militar ilegal lo removió del poder y, posteriormente, las voces pro-chavistas ganaron mayor espacio en la cobertura del líder venezolano.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Objetividad, esfera pública, fuentes noticiosas, cubrimiento periodístico, parcialidad.

ABSTRACT

To what degree are voices that conflict with hegemonic views heard in mainstream world news coverage, and how do those patterns of public discourse change as breaking events unfold? This paper examines articles published in U.S. elite media of Venezuelan President Chavez during 2001-2002. Sixty five articles from the New York Times were content analyzed in three time periods (pre-coup, coup, and post-coup). We find that anti-Chavez voices slightly dominated public sphere discourse until an illegal coup removed him from power, and subsequently pro-Chavista voices gained more entry.

KEY WORDS: *Objectivity, public sphere model, press coverage.*

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INTRODUCTION

The debate swirling around venezuelan president Hugo Chavez has been covered heavily by international news organizations. With its rich oil supply and strategic position, Venezuela occupies an important position in U.S. international news. However, since his first electoral win, president Chavez has earned his fair share of coverage as the center of debate within Venezuela regarding the legitimacy of his administration. Indeed, the issue has divided the country, with Chavez loyalists and Chavez opponents bitterly estranged. Such polarization resulted in a dramatic *coup d'etat* in 2002 that temporarily removed him from power. Chavez' opposition sponsored the coup; his supporters forced his return.

Chavez has also become newsworthy because of his well-publicized opposition to U.S. policies. Coverage of the president's actions, ideology, and rhetoric tend to place him in direct contrast with the United States, and particularly against the Bush administration, who have called him a "negative force in the region" (Sullivan, 2005). At least to some degree, Chavez has purposefully sought to create such an image. For example, Chavez has threatened to limit oil shipments to the United States; aligned himself with U.S. foes such as Cuban president Fidel Castro and Iranian president Mohammad Khatami; purchased arms from Russia; and led street demonstrations against Bush during the November 2005 meeting of the Organization of American States in Argentina (Sullivan, p. A1; Tierney, 2005).

Given the polarization of the debate within Venezuela surrounding Chavez, and the stance of the U.S. political elite toward him, it would be a logical first reaction to state that U.S. elite media cover him in a fairly lopsided manner. Research has posited that journalists tend to mirror hegemonic views with their coverage. However, less is known about how breaking events spin stories and perspectives, especially when the hegemonic view is suddenly delegitimized to some degree as events unfold. In the days before, during and after an illegal coup that was

reportedly supported to some degree by the Bush administration, how would coverage change as Chavez was restored to power and the international community condemned the removal of a democratically-elected president from power. Would this create a situation where pro-Chavez voices would not find their way into U.S. news? Or would journalists working within a media system founded on the twin pillars of objectivity and balance structure their content to follow the debate raging within Venezuela? To address this, we chose to study the content of *The New York Times* articles regarding Hugo Chavez before, during, and after the failed *coup d'etat* that temporarily removed him from power. Were supporters or opposition more prevalent in certain periods in news constructed by journalists? The question is grounded in the idea of the news media as a determinant of debate in the public sphere realm, where journalists and editors construct news stories that ostensibly aid the formation of an intelligent and well-informed polity.

JOURNALISTS' CONSTRUCTION OF THE NEWS

The news media have important functions in democratic society. Classic democratic theory argues that diverse voices must be heard in debate, so that elites and non-elites may make careful, reasoned choices at election time. Such debate must take place in constructed public spheres, according to Habermas and others, where individuals should be able to use their powers of agency to formulate and affect state governance (Dahlgren, 1991; Habermas, 1989). In recent times, the news media have become important determinants for who communicates with mass publics (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). News media have replaced the village green or town hall as forums for public debate, and essentially build public opinion from the formation of public bodies from individuals (Curran, 1991).

Indeed, the significance of the media in the formation of not only public perceptions and attitudes but the direction of

policymaking has been the subject of much debate. Interactions between media content, policymaking, and public perceptions have yielded substantial research. Media, policymakers and citizens interact to formulate agendas as to what are the important issues of the day, whether or not they will be considered, and to what degree (McCombs & Bell, 1996). These issues are depicted in the news articles constructed by journalists, who in turn are influenced by various factors in their construction (Bagdikian, 2004; Gandy, 1982). This paradigm of news as being socially constructed has evolved from earlier models that portrayed the journalist has simply deciding which piece of constructed and complete information to allow through the gates. From this perspective, journalists and editors in effect construct reality with each story that possesses an internal validity (Tuchman, 1976, p. 97).

News as social constructions creates avenues for criticism, especially in media systems supposedly dominated by the ideal of objective, information-oriented and neutral reporting. If information is truly neutral, then there is nothing to create, as articles would exist as *a priori* arrangements. But social construction implies hierarchical selection processes in a somewhat subjective capacity, and as being vulnerable to capture by powerful interests. This is the core of the Habermasian critique. In terms of the public sphere, mass media act as conditioners of public opinion by dominating the public sphere with elite definitions and terms (Bennett, et al., 2004; Curran, 1991; Entman, 2004).

How this has come to be true has been examined from various angles. Political economists argue that structural factors impacting news organizations and journalists can influence the construction of the news. Effects from industry conglomeration and concentration, and pressure from political and economic powers shape how news is created. Sociologists focus more on the internal pressures and constraints upon journalistic autonomy and efforts, looking at organizational and institutional factors such as routines and incentives (Schudson, 1989).

Political economists have studied the effects of increasing conglomeration and concentration in media industries. Many

lament these trends as having alarming consequences for diversity in media content, especially in market-driven media systems. Increasing conglomeration of industries produces concentration, which in turn affects the news media in several negative ways, including: strategic use of media for political gain of corporate owners; homogenization of content; cross promotion; and tabloidization (Picard, 1998, pp. 193, 208). Resource control has implications for the Fourth Estate function of the press. Commercial media, dependent upon advertisers for revenue and government for information, is essentially captured by powerful interests and therefore does not serve the public interest (Bagdikian, 2004; Herman & Chomsky, 1988). In fact, from this view, media can aid in depoliticizing their publics by giving standardized, similar, more entertainment-oriented products that consumers would be likely to buy, instead of information they need to be active agents (McChesney, 1999).

More sociological approaches have examined the journalist as the starting point, positing that the starting point to understand how news is made is the interaction of news organizations and government bureaucracies (Schudson, 1989, p. 271). Daily routines of journalists and the demands created by changing news production processes and technological development create incentives for reporters to create news in a systematic way. Studies examining source and channel diversity have been particularly illuminating, in this view. Empirical approaches have fairly consistently found that reporters covering national and international news tend to rely on official sources and routine channels (Bennett, 1990; Brown et al., 1989; Gans, 1979; Hallin et al., 1993; Sigal, 1973; Zoch & Turk, 1998). Diverse points of view were not garnering similar space, time or importance by media professionals, as journalists rely on official sources for information. This may be, as some have argued, because official sources lend an air of authority to an article; or it may be a product of the need to efficiently produce news 24 hours a day given the structural arrangements of the news organization. A more plausible explanation that it is a combination of structural,

technological, organizational and ideological factors (Brown et al., 1989).

Elite debate confines have been posited as powerful determinants of media coverage. Hallin (1986; 1994) found that in times of elite consensus, journalists were more likely to maintain consensus by creating news stories that did not contest elite views. However, during times of elite debate, journalists introduced dissenting views into articles, but within the confines of prominent discussion. The degree of presidential power as measured by elite and popular support for the president have also been correlated to positive newspaper editorials of the executive and his actions (Schaefer, 1997).

Bennett's indexing theory suggests that journalists build their news stories as reflections of the actual degree of elite consensus or debate among established interests (Bennett, 1990). From this view, journalists tie their representations of conflict or debate to elite cues or conflicts. In cases of foreign policy, national security, and defense matters, evidence supports the indexing hypothesis (Hallin et al., 1993; Dickson, 1992; Kim, 2000). Others have found exceptions to the indexing hypothesis: when journalists take cues from each other during scandal reporting; when disasters or tragic events elicit "cultural scripts"; or when voices from civil society emerge as a result of public relations strategies (literature reviewed in Bennett, et al, 2004).

Building on the indexing theory, others have suggested other organizational and individual factors as influencing behavior. The effects of journalist routines and incentives created by news organizations to create a product on time and deliverable to publics have also been factored into what type of coverage results. Niven (2005) suggests that incentive structures created by journalists' desire to please their superiors with timely, sellable product as well as their colleagues with impressive, high-quality product, and the need to limit criticism and minimize costs of production create a reliance on routines associated with elite consensus. When elite consensus is high, journalists have less freedom to report

independently. Gender also has been posited as a factor influencing source selection. Female reporters are more likely to include information from female sources than are their male counterparts, although the vast majority of sources cited tend to be men in some sort of official capacity, according to a study by Zoch & Turk (1998).

Entman's (2004, pp.9-22) model of cascading activation describes how frames and information in the news moves from elite sources to the media and then to publics in a stratified, hierarchical manner. At the highest level, presidential sources release information organized within select frames, which can be contested or upheld by journalists. In some cases, elite opponents concerned with public opinion can challenge presidential frames, as can journalists motivated by professional standards and expectations (pp. 9-22).

The effects of source selection on the construction of the public agenda have also been studied in some detail, with mixed results. Has the use of high-level sources in government created a situation where a few elite insiders determine the media agenda, as Reese et al. (1994) have found, or do regular citizens constrain elite management of then news in cases when "unaffiliated individuals" are the primary sources of information in some cases, as Salwen (1995) determined was the case in coverage following Hurricane Andrew? The debate revolving around who gets to be heard by what publics, and the mechanisms they utilize to reach their publics forms a heuristic bridge across communication research, bridging journalism and public relations investigations and inquiry.

Therefore, an examination of elite news coverage of a controversial international figure that spans this period of self-reflection and apologia could serve to aid future research of the public sphere, especially in relation to how foreign nations and individuals and coverage of them, may impact the discourse in a nation's public sphere. In particular, the case of how *The New York Times* has covered venezuelan president Hugo Chavez could serve to illuminate several points:

Are articles regarding a political issue a mirror of elite views, or do voices that conflict with hegemonic opinions enter with

equal footing? Does this change over time, given the occurrence of strategic events that could affect how an issue is presented?

The case of president Chavez provides a unique opportunity to examine elite newspaper coverage of a controversial public figure across time and through periods where hegemonic views were alternately legitimized and not supported. The next section provides an overview of the Chavez case, followed by this study's research question and method of inquiry.

VENEZUELAN CASE

Venezuelan president Hugo Chavez won the presidential elections by a landslide in 1998, based on populist promises to reform corrupt, oligarchic arrangements and transform Venezuela. A colorful character, he had been involved as a military officer in a failed 1992 coup attempt against the government of then-President Andres Perez and subsequently was imprisoned. Before this, the country's two main political parties were thought to have exercised oligarchic country over Venezuela, and to have squandered wealth from Venezuela's oil reserves. (Profile, 2002; 2005). Chavez' populist and "revolutionary" rhetoric, combined with programs and initiatives have earned him the loyal support of certain sectors of venezuelan society, particularly among the poor and lower-middle classes.

However, it is precisely this type of rhetoric, combined with actions such as nationalizing the oil company and a land reform program that would allow the state to seize underused ranches without compensation that have earned Chavez the rabid opposition of other sectors of venezuelan society, particularly among the business sector and upper classes. His high-profile closeness with cuban leader Fidel Castro, revolutionary speech style, recent purchases of arms from the former Soviet Union, and public encouragement of all things anti-capitalist and anti-globalization have earned him the distrust and fear of many other sectors, among them the Bush administration and traditional political elite of Latin America (Profile, 2005).

Accusations by Chavez of U.S. spying and assassination attempts, as well as threats to cut oil shipments to the United States have also served to further exacerbate the tension. Along with a well-publicized appearance on the Al-Jazeera television network and a trip to Libya to receive an award from Moammar Gaddafi, Chavez has in effect "cast himself as the anti-Bush" (Sullivan, 2005, p. A1).

Within Venezuela, Chavez is the subject of even more controversy and tension. His supporters, mostly the poor, back him feverishly and have elected him twice to the office of the presidency. The opposition is loud and sustained, able to repeatedly send critical messages of Chavez as much of the country's media is controlled by Chavez' opposition (Covering Chavez, 2003). Repeated national and general strikes have crippled local economies.

Tensions seemed to come to a head on April 11, 2002, when a coup led by an alliance between the venezuelan military and oppositional figures stormed the presidential palace and arrested him, after days of rioting left an estimated 90 people dead. Two days later, after mass demonstrations by pro-Chavez supporters and response from the international community opposing the coup, Chavez was flown back to Caracas and returned to office (Campbell, 2002).

Not all of the international community may have been opposed to the coup, however. Accusations of U.S. involvement began almost immediately, with the arrested interim president Pedro Carmona stating he was visited by high-level U.S. officials before and after the coup. Indeed, in the initial moments of the coup, newspaper accounts described the "barely veiled sense of satisfaction" of U.S. officials with Chavez' forced resignation and arrest, quoting one insider as noting, "'Obviously, nobody's shedding tears up here'" (Slevin, 2002, p. A17). Elite media editorials initially cautiously praised the coup. One editorial (Chavez departs) ran by the *Times* on April 13, 2002, two days after the coup, had as its lead:

> "With yesterday's resignation of president Hugo Chavez, venezuelan democracy is no longer threatened by a would-be dictator. Mr. Chavez, a ruinous demagogue, stepped down after the military intervened and handed power to a respected business leader, Pedro Carmona." (p. 16).

However, those news organizations quickly were rebuked by critics who denounced any form of illegal removal of a democratically-elected leader, pointing out that president Chavez neither resigned nor handed power to the opposition voluntarily. Editorials commending the coup in the name of democratic progress were followed by muted explanations and revision that reproached media and government response as "betrayals of democracy" for praising a violent and illegal coup attempt (Venezuela's Breakdown, 2002; Valenzuela, 2002).

To answer these questions, one must look at certain dimensions of discourse relating to diversity, entry and legitimacy of sources in the public sphere. Bennett et al.'s (2004) public sphere discourse model is an especially appropriate guide to do so.

PUBLIC SPHERE MODEL

From the public sphere perspective, Bennett et al. (2004) developed a public sphere discourse model to assess the degree to which an autonomous mediated public sphere is being formulated. Within this model, certain conditions must be met for public deliberation of an issue or event to effectively and credibly take place. These are: *access* for various viewpoints that go beyond elite to include civil or nongovernmental voices; comparable *recognition* of those voices; and permitting the various voices to *respond* to one another. Access is the idea that different voices are included in the discourse, especially the degree to which nongovernmental, or "civil" voices, to use Hallin el al.'s (1993) terminology, are granted entry into the discussion. Recognition is related to both access and responsiveness, but is conceptualized in terms of the legitimating

of access and responses. And responsiveness is the degree to which journalists invite oppositional reactions (pp. 440-446).

This model is a useful one for ascertaining the degree to which the Habermasian ideal of a public sphere is being upheld by various media outlets, in terms of their willingness to include diverse voices and points of view, and grant equal legitimacy to civil and statist sources. An autonomous public sphere may have positive implications for the quality of democracy, and as a concept is useful for journalism and media research. Regarding the Chavez case, it permits an analytical investigation into how sources in elite news were legitimized, recognized and granted access into the public sphere. If the pattern established by previous research were to hold true, one would expect that up to the point of the coup, U.S. elite media coverage of Chavez would have given more entry and space to Chavez' opposition, as their viewpoints were in accordance with those of the Bush administration. Therefore, the hypotheses and research questions guiding this study are:

- (Null1) There is no significant change in terms of the access given to pro-, anti- and neutral voices across time.
- (Null2) There is no significant change in terms of the legitimacy given to pro-, anti- and neutral voices across time.
- RQ1: What normative view of Chavez was granted most access into *Times'* articles before, during and directly after the 2002 coup?
- RQ2: What normative view of Chavez was granted the most legitimacy in *Times'* articles before, during and directly after the 2002 coup?

METHOD

The unit of analysis is the source. Articles in *The New York Times* were examined, as it professes to be a paper of record in the United States, and is thought to be an agenda-setting influence for other

media, as well as being highly consumed by journalists and elite audiences (Tift & Jones, 1999). Further, the *Times* has a Caracas bureau, so news articles could ostensibly include a diverse range of voices from within Venezuela, and not simply rely on those based in the United States.

Following the Bennett et al. model, we conceptualized access as the degree to which voices are permitted entry into the public sphere, and we operationalized *access* as the number of times mentioned in news articles. However, in our conceptualization of the second dimension, we differed slightly from the 2004 model. Their operationalization of *recognition* included measures counting the number of lines given to each source, and whether sources were identified by names or organizations (p. 446).Because of the nature of the subject, we chose not to include the measure of identification, and to look at the number of lines awarded to each source as the source's *legitimation* by the journalists. We chose to do this after an initial coding session of the articles showed that identification of sources was not always given, and not necessarily because the journalist was not assigning importance to the source's comments. Rather, it was because of the volatile nature of the unfolding events. Sources refused to identify themselves on both sides of the debate, for fear of retribution by the other side, or other reasons relating to personal safety. Therefore, we chose to look at the number of lines attributed to each source as a measure of the source's legitimacy, or the degree to which the journalist was marking the source's comments as important by allotting them space in a tightly packed article.

Sources were conceived of as pro- or anti-Chavez, or neutral. Time periods were sorted as previously described into three epochs: pre-coup, coup, and post-coup. Lengths of these time periods were selected not only to meet strategic dates, such as the day of the coup, but also to give relative uniformity to sample size. The period from April 10, 2001 to April 10, 2002 is considered to be the pre-coup period. April 11, 2002 to May 1, 2002 is considered to be the period during the immediate coup. Although the coup lasted

two days, we allowed the two following weeks to be included as a means of controlling for fall out, arrests, and the return to power of all deposed officials. May 2, 2002 to December 31, 2002 is the post-coup period.

Using Lexus-Nexus, we searched for stories using the words HUGO CHAVEZ in full text during these periods. Approximately 50 articles resulted from the search during the pre-coup period; 60 articles resulted from the search during the coup period; and approximately 100 articles resulted from the post-coup period search.

In determining what articles to use for the analysis, we first followed several general guidelines. As the goal of this content analysis is to determine what voices gained entry and legitimation within the public sphere as part of a political debate, it is necessary to select the articles that have the most chance of entering the public sphere as political news. We discarded all articles that appeared in sections other than the news (A) section; for example, articles dealing with oil price fluctuations in Venezuela that appeared in the Business and Finance sections.

Stories other than news articles were discarded, i.e. editorials, as we are examining voices incorporated, and editorials by their nature are from one voice. We also discarded non-full length stories. For example, world news briefs that just made a mention of Chavez were not included. Again, as the purpose is to analyze recognition and legitimating of pro- and anti-chavista voices, articles that had more space for such discussion were those selected. In total, we coded 65 articles from the three periods, with 22 from before the coup; 20 from the coup period; and 23 following the coup.

Next, we followed the Bennett et al. (2004) model of thematic identification using the constant comparative method. Thematic categories were identified, and then streamlined into categories. As this study is concentrating on discourse relating to the controversy surrounding Hugo Chavez as president of Venezuela, we selected the articles which had predominant themes dealing with this issue. Therefore, stories that dealt indirectly with

the theme—such as articles about strife in Latin America, or the U.S. president's initiatives in the region—were discarded.

In developing the codebook for the analysis, we concentrated on pro-Chavez and anti-Chavez voices heard in the articles. To determine categories of sources, we first selected a random subsample of the articles to be coded in order to develop categories of source types. After coding 20 articles, coders found seven major source types used in the articles:

- Hugo Chavez
- Venezuelan politicians
- Venezuelan businessmen
- Venezuelan military
- Venezuelan civil society
- Experts on Venezuela
- U.S. government officials

After these categories were recorded in the codebook, we first coded all sources in the selected articles. Then, we assigned source types a source tone. These were operationalized as pro-chavez source tone, anti-chavez source tone, or neutral. Identification of source, language used, and ideas expressed were all considered in determining source tone. Pro-chavista voices were those that expressed a positive idea regarding Chavez as president, the legitimacy of his government, and support for his administration. Those who were expressly identified as supporters of Chavez were coded as pro-chavista if their language did not contradict the label. Finally, those that expressed negativity toward Chavez' opposition were also coded as pro-chavista. Anti-chavista voices were those that expressed a negative idea regarding Chavez as president, support for his opposition, and/or the idea that his government was bankrupt, corrupt, or otherwise unfit to be in power. Anti-Chavez labels were given to sources expressly identified as members of the opposition, as long as their language did not contradict the label. Neutral voices were those that did not express a primarily

positive or negative view. Examples of pro-chavista source tone quotes include:

- "'We're defending president Chavez' revolution,' Johnny Franco, 49, said. 'He is the only president we have ever had who looked out for all the people.'"
- "[The leaders of an anti-Chavez organization have] 'fallen into the hands of rightist extremists who, utilizing the media, propose the return to the old politics and play to the fascist sectors of the country,' said Guillermo Garcia Ponce, a member of Mr. Chavez' left-leaning Boliviarian Revolutionary Movement."

Examples of anti-chavista voices include:

- "'Today's demonstration is enough for president Chavez to see the need to call for elections or to resign,' said Carlos Fernandez, a leader in the opposition movement and president of the country's largest business federation."
- "'I do not like to say it, but this does not change without violence,' Oswaldo Palacios, 38, a shop owner who opposed Mr. Chavez, said at Altamira. 'Chavez is a criminal. The presence of Chavez is the crisis.'"

Examples of neutral voices included:

- "'It's polarized to the extent of mutual contempt bordering on hatred, so you have people who even refuse to talk to other people,' said a Western diplomat in Caracas."
- "'There has to be an electoral solution to this, and both sides at least say this is what they favor,' Mr. Shifter said. 'Chavez said we can do it in August, but the opposition says it can't wait."

In terms of legitimation, we followed Bennett et al.'s model in terms of the amount of news space given to each source. We first copied the Lexus-Nexus articles onto Microsoft Word in order to standardize the format. Then, we counted the lines of text given to each source. When the source consisted of an entire paragraph, all lines were counted. When the source was not the entire paragraph, then only the sentence with the source included was counted. In total, we coded 1,905 lines of text attributed to sources.

RESULTS

From the 65 articles, 377 sources were coded in terms of their tone, the number of lines given, and the time period in which they occurred. Two coders each coded 100 percent of the articles. Total intercoder reliability was 95 percent, based on Scott's pi. The frequencies and percents of sources logged per time period can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1
Number of sources per time period

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Pre coup	127	33.7	33.7
Coup	126	33.4	67.1
Post coup	124	32.9	100.0
Total	**377**	**100.0**	

There was relative uniformity of sources found across time, with only a half-percent or less difference in sources noted. But how many of them were pro-, anti- or neutral on the subject of Chavez? We recoded the source types to feature the predominate tone, with (1) including all the pro-Chavez voices; (2) including all the anti-Chavez voices; and (3) representing the neutral voices. Table 2 charts the differences. The results were not significant *($p >$*

.05), but the results are interesting nonetheless. Pro-Chavez voices went up sharply after the coup, representing over 50 percent of all sources in articles. Anti-Chavez voices declined, from over 50 percent before and during, to 43 percent post-coup. And neutral voices did not change, with relatively stables showings of 5 percent across time.

Table 2

Cross tabulations of access over time

			TIME PERIOD			TOTAL
			PRE COUP	COUP	POST COUP	
SOURCE RECODED	1.00	COUNT	54	53	63	170
		% WITHIN TIME PERIOD	42.5%	42.1%	50.8%	45.1%
	2.00	COUNT	66	66	54	186
		% WITHIN TIME PERIOD	52.0%	52.4%	43.5%	49.3%
	3.00	COUNT	7	7	7	21
		% WITHIN TIME PERIOD	5.5%	5.6%	5.6%	5.6%
TOTAL		COUNT	127	126	124	377
		% WITHIN TIME PERIOD	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Certain types of sources were seen as deviating from the expected levels, and chi-squares were significant ($p < .05$). Besides Chavez, pro- and anti-Chavez politicians and neutral and anti-Chavez U.S. government officials, as well as pro-Chavez experts registered significant levels of occurrence over time (see Table 3). Quotes from Chavez more than tripled from pre-coup to post-coup. Pro-Chavez politicians declined, as Chavez became his own spokesperson.

Table 3
Time period and source type

		TYPE OF SOURCES						TOTAL
		CHAVEZ	PRO-CHAVEZ POLITICIANS	OPPOSITION POLITICIANS	U.S. GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS	EXPERTS COMMENT PRO-CHAVEZ	U.S. GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS NEGATIVE COMMENT	
PRE COUP	COUNT	17	32	29	16	3	4	101
	% WITHIN TIME PERIOD	16.8%	31.7%	28.7%	15.8%	3.0%	4.0%	100.0%
COUP	COUNT	11	32	24	22	7	7	103
	% WITHIN TIME PERIOD	10.7%	31.1%	23.3%	21.4%	6.8%	6.8%	100.0%
POST COUP	COUNT	26	23	35	14	10	1	109
	% WITHIN TIME PERIOD	23.9%	21.1%	32.1%	12.8%	9.2%	.9%	100.0%
TOTAL	COUNT	54	87	88	52	20	12	313
	% WITHIN TIME PERIOD	17.3%	27.8%	28.1%	16.6%	6.4%	3.8%	100.0%

Political opposition increased, as did pro-Chavez experts. Anti-Chavez U.S. government officials declined after a spike during the coup, as did neutral U.S. government officials.

To address the question of legitimacy, we recoded the number of lines in order to be able to test for significance. Sources that had five or less were recoded as (1); sources that had six to 10 lines were (2); and sources that had 11+ became (3). The results are shown across time in Table 4. Again, the results were not statistically significant, but provided a glimpse into coverage. Sources were given much more room to expound, with those having 11 or more almost doubling, during the coup. One can imagine the stringer finding it difficult, in the early chaos, to sort out fact from fiction.

Table 4

Time period with number of lines per source

			NUMBER OF LINES SOURCE 1			TOTAL
			1	2	3	
TIME PERIOD	PRE COUP	COUNT	97	23	7	127
		% WITHIN TIME PERIOD	76.4%	18.1%	5.5%	100.0%
	COUP	COUNT	82	31	13	126
		% WITHIN TIME PERIOD	65.1%	24.6%	10.3%	100.0%
	POST COUP	COUNT	81	33	10	124
		% WITHIN TIME PERIOD	65.3%	26.6%	8.1%	100.0%
	TOTAL	COUNT	260	87	30	377
		% WITHIN TIME PERIOD	69.0%	23.1%	8.0%	100.0%

Table 5 illustrates the percent of sources that were granted 10 or more lines per mention. Again, source 1 is pro-Chavez, 2 is anti-Chavez, and 3 is neutral. One can see that more pro-Chavez supporters were granted more room to expound after the coup; the opposite happened to Chavez opposition. The results were not statistically significant.

Table 5

Percent of sources with 10 or more lines

	PRE COUP	COUP	POST-COUP
SOURCE TYPE 1	38	44	50
SOURCE TYPE 2	62	44	40
SOURCE TYPE 3	0	12	0
TOTAL	100	100	100

Certain types of sources granted more space also varied, and this was statistically significant ($p < .05$). One can compare Table 6 with Table 3 to note some interesting changes. Chavez remained a primary legitimating force in news coverage, with 18 percent of all source comments over 10 lines. His primary political opponents were also granted similar space, with 10 percent of 10 or more

lines. Finally, as the articles were written for a U.S. audience, U.S. government officials made up 17 percent of comments with 10 or more lines. The number of lines was recoded in a similar manner as before, with one-five lines representing (1); six-nine representing (2); and 10+ (3). Primary discourse was occurring between Chavez, his political allies, his political opposition, and U.S. government officials and experts. The debate was largely confined to elite lines.

Table 6

Type of source and number of lines over time

			NUMBER OF LINES SOURCE 1			TOTAL
			1	2	3	
TYPE OF SOURCES	CHAVEZ	COUNT	28	16	10	54
		% WITHIN TYPE OF SOURCES	51.9%	29.6%	18.5%	100.0%
	PRO-CHAVEZ POLITICIANS	COUNT	67	17	3	87
		% WITHIN TYPE OF SOURCES	77.0%	19.5%	3.4%	100.0%
	OPPOSITION POLITICIANS	COUNT	68	11	9	88
		% WITHIN TYPE OF SOURCES	77.3%	12.5%	10.2%	100.0%
	U.S. GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS	COUNT	13	6	4	23
		% WITHIN TYPE OF SOURCES	56.5%	26.1%	17.4%	100.0%
	EXPERTS COMMENT PRO-CHAVEZ	COUNT	10	9	1	20
		% WITHIN TYPE OF SOURCES	50.0%	45.0%	5.0%	100.0%
	U.S. GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS NEGATIVE COMMENT	COUNT	8	4	0	12
		% WITHIN TYPE OF SOURCES	66.7%	33.3%	.0%	100.0%
TOTAL		COUNT	194	63	27	284
		% WITHIN TYPE OF SOURCES	68.3%	22.2%	9.5%	100.0%

DISCUSSION

The results indicated that before the coup, the U.S. elite press followed the cues of political leaders by giving more entry and space to voices of Chavez opponents than to Chavez supporters.

This trend continued during the days of the coup, and immediately following Chavez' return to power. However, as time passed and the U.S. political elites and elite media absorbed the criticism of the international community for praising the illegal removal of a democratically-elected leader, entry shifted to Chavez supporters. Neutral voices held steady, in terms of their access to public sphere discourse. This supports the view that as U.S. government elite views shifted in terms of their approval of the interim government, news reporters shifted their coverage to include more of the pro-Chavez.

As time went on, Chavez and his supporters gained more access, but less space within news articles. Further, Chavez began increasingly acting as his own spokesperson; or rather, news reporters began to paint him as the primary spokesperson to represent that side of the debate. The debate mirrored elite lines, as discourse was confined to U.S. elite, Chavez political allies and political opposition.

Those who have studied journalistic reliance on elite views have generally lamented the trend as constituting excessive management of public sphere debate. This is, of course, an argument that is not uniformly accepted. Others would argue that by relying on elite views, journalists are not necessarily damaging democratic quality. Public officials are, after all, democratically selected representatives of the people, and therefore have views that are of importance to their citizenry (Gaventa, 1980; Lichter et al., 1986). However, in the case of Hugo Chavez, who counts with support from a broad sector of Venezuela, yet is the subject of such polarized debate, the implications for following elite views could have implications for the comprehension of the U.S. public of the substantive issue, and could have to do with the ability of each source type to communicate their message to international audiences.

Indeed, the opposition to Chavez is formed by much of the Venezuelan elite. His opposition not only includes much of the upper- and upper-middle-classes in Venezuela, but also is formed

by a large part of the venezuelan exile community living in the U.S., many U.S.- and Venezuela-based consultancies and think tanks, as well as nearly all of the private media in Venezuela. Conversely, Chavez' supporters come from primarily the poor and lower-middle-class sectors of Venezuela. The opposition, therefore, has broad access not only to resources to spread their message, but the means to do so. This supports Bennett et al.'s supposition that the elements of public spheres "will vary systematically across news accounts involving different combinations of status, authority, office, and other markers of social and political identity" (2004, p. 452). A journalist in Caracas, following organizational and professional routines, may gravitate to those sectors who traditionally are power-holders and agenda shapers. Additionally, those sectors would ostensibly want to actively seek out a journalist from an elite, agenda-setting media outlet in order to communicate their message and convince international audiences of the legitimacy of their demands.

CONCLUSIONS

This study applied a version Bennett et al.'s (2004) model of public sphere discourse to *The New York Times'* coverage of Hugo Chavez before, during, and after the 2002 coup d'etat that temporarily removed him from power. The question asked was, how did coverage change over time, in terms of the access and legitimation given to polarized viewpoints, one of which conflicted with U.S. hegemonic attitudes, while the other supported it? Previous research examining the selective use of sources to construct news articles concluded, in part, that in certain cases journalists will mirror elite debate of a subject, or follow hegemonic lines of discourse in coverage of issues that deal with national security or foreign policy. The case of Venezuela's Hugo Chavez presented a useful case study to see if these suppositions hold true in the period of self-reflection of much of the news media following scandals involving quality of editorial oversight and reporting in terms of

the adherence to the U.S. model of objective, accurate and neutral reporting. We chose to look at *The New York Times* articles for this study, for several reasons. Considered a paper of record, the *Times* is considered to set the agenda for other media outlets in the U.S., and therefore themes presented in *Times* articles would be taken up by other outlets. The *Times* is also useful, as during the coup it published a series of congratulatory articles praising the takeover, for which it subsequently had to print mea culpas for advocating an illegal and unconstitutional removal of a democratically elected president. Did the newspaper's coverage change after the coup to allow more access and recognition of voices in an ongoing conflict revolving around the presidency of Hugo Chavez?

By applying a version of Bennett et al.'s public discourse model to determine levels of access and recognition for opposing points of view from before, during and after the coup, we asked if the public sphere included opposing voices, or if the conflict presented primarily one point of view. Results indicated that pro-Chavez voices gained in terms of their entry and legitimation in the public sphere after the coup.

This study supported earlier research that posited U.S. elite media tend to follow the lines of U.S. hegemonic debate. When there was little debate in powerful political circles regarding the legitimacy (or lack thereof) of President Chavez, news media gave more voice to sources supporting this perspective. However, after debate began in Washington following the criticism of Republican support (and perhaps intervention in) of the coup, spaces opened for neutral and contrary voices in the coverage. This study would be well served by future research that compared Chavez coverage across newspapers, in order to correct for any organizational bias resulting from Times coverage. Extending time periods analyzed here could also detect current trends in terms of coverage. Other analysis of placement of sources could better detect nuances in terms of whose voice was heard first, as much research has indicated few consumers actually read articles through to the end. Finally, this study did not address the third component of Bennett et al.'s

model, responsiveness. An analysis of the degree to which opposing claims were given the opportunity to respond to the other's claims could yield different results.

In most countries, those with more access and resources have greater possibility of having their voices heard and demands satisfied. This inequality is exacerbated in Latin America, where a significant portion of the population lives below the poverty line. In the case of Venezuela, the debate surrounding Hugo Chavez is built on these cleavages, of the rich and the poor, of neighborhoods and ideologies. A public sphere managed by those with the means to do so is an unfortunate affirmation of the habermasian critique. In this case, perhaps fate and an astonishing turn of events permitted more of a voice for those who are traditionally excluded from elite news coverage. Whether this was simply a unique turn of events or an ongoing trend has yet to be established.

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